MURTADHA MUTAHHARI

The Truth About AL-HUSSAIN'S REVOLT



Translated by
NAJIM AL-KHAFAJI

Translator's Note

In undertaking the translation of this booklet, *Haqiqatun Nahdhal Hussainiya,* The Truth About Al-Hussain's Revolt, by Martyr Ayatollah Murtadha Mutahhari, I have been keen on conveying the meaning to the English reader in standard English from the Arabic text that was translated from Farsi by Sadiq al-Baqqal. I hope I have succeeded in this task. I also hope that this translation will benefit people who are interested in acquiring knowledge about Islamic topics.

It is noteworthy, however, that the booklet is a transcript of a sermon/lecture the late author had delivered in gatherings held in Tehran for the annual commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (a.s.). Thus, the reader may come across some repetitions that are typical of the style of delivery, although I have done my best to minimize these to a level that, I think, is acceptable.

Where I thought the meaning of the text would be enhanced or rendered more intelligible, I have put the additional words, which do not constitute part of the original text, between square brackets, thus []. I did the same with other pieces of information I have provided that are, in my judgement, beneficial to the reader. On certain occasions, I felt the need to keep the Arabic word, which I enclosed between these ( ) brackets, alongside its English equivalent, so as to reinforce the meaning.

In this translation, I relied on the Arabic edition, published by the International Relations Division, Organisation for Missions (Bunyad Bi'that), Tehran, Iran.

Finally, I have thought that the reader might benefit of some other aspects of the story of Imam Hussain's martyrdom, especially those dealing with the universal dimension of his message. Thus, I have chosen excerpts from the Introduction to "*Sunshine at Midnight (The Kerbala Epic)*", a rhymed version of the story of Kerbala in English, by the late S.A. Mahdi, 1985. You will find these passages under the Introduction.

Najim al-Khafaji, BA, MIL
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Hussain – the Universalist

It is in the very nature of great reformers that they belong to everybody, everywhere. Hussain's noble deed is so relevant to the entire human race that I am sure there is a far bigger audience waiting for him somewhere than the one he already has. All that is required is to draw people's attention.

Contemporary society, irrespective of race and religion, would do well to have a closer look at the Hero of Kerbala as his message transcends the barriers of caste creed, race and religion. Advocates of human rights, sociologists, reformers, theologians, all included, will find "delightful wisdom, sweet instructions, and a meaning suited to their mind", in his story. His message is certainly not an exclusive preserve of any particular group. It embraces the entire human race. It was not a power struggle. Hussain persistently and explicitly expounded, " What matters to me is to "correct not conquer" – An affirmation that he would die in the firm belief that a despot's idiosyncrasies could never be an effective instrument of religious policies.

Yezid became too big for his boots and assumed the characteristics of a despot who, almost as a condition of his position, made boastful and frivolous claims that he alone could lead the nation [*ummah*].

Hussain was, however, committed to redeeming Islam and maintaining the faith intact.

He hoped that matters would improve and kept a low profile to preserve amity. He had a clear choice: stand aside and let Yezid act according to his whims; (and thus join in and implicitly justify his abominable escapades) or counter his devious bluster. Hussain had to decide: to take the situation in its stride as a price worth paying for the "status quo"; or view it as an ominous foretaste of the consequences of the extensive damage done by the far-reaching anti-Islamic activities of Yezid, the mammon of unrighteousness, whose lust for power prompted him to beat the nation into the mould he favoured. He and his profane crew conspired to scuttle the ship of Islam by worse than heinous deeds, violating the aims for which Islam was born.

Hussain had no desire to live under such a corrupt Caliph. He wanted to act as quietly and as "spontaneously" as possible so as to limit the possibilities of an open clash with the Calip. But Yezid bargained hard. Hussain could not take his effervescent nonsense perpetually and did what was right.

If the moral standards of human behaviour were as high as they were in the person of Hussain the world would be a better place to live in, is the obvious inference. His incredible cool and superhuman moral courage to achieve his mission stirs our deepest emotions. His exemplary conduct, throughout, and adorable conscience tore Yezid's monstrous designs to shreds.

The virtuous people will continue to do their duty to maintain righteousness in this world and in this they are entitled to universal recognition and support. Hussain's acceptance of persecution in the cause of humanity was most convincing and moving proof of God's immanence in men. He was a man par excellence who maintained the highest standards set by the martyrs and heroes of all ages.

With a courage that was more than human he managed to leave a message for the entire world, “Do not submit to exploitation, of any kind; maintain a tenacious grip on veracity; better die with honour than live in shame”. He surely deserves universal recognition. “He is an immortal heir of universal praise”. More than Fourteen hundred years have passed but the memory of that adorable hero, who resolutely faced the soul-searching trials and tribulations, has not diminished. On the contrary, it has grown in intensity. Imbued with exemplary fortitude, moral fibre and aplomb, Hussain has emerged as the most revered and meritorious martyr the world has produced, who established the highest standards of excellence of which humanity prides itself.

* Excerpts from the Introduction to “Sunshine at Midnight (The Kerbala Epic)”, a rhymed version of the story of Kerbala in English, by the late S.A. Mahdi, 1985.

The Truth About Al-Hussain’s Revolt

Different phenomena vary as to their realities. Similarly, every uprising or revolt is unique as to the truth/s underlying its eruption *[and eventual success or otherwise].*

In order to understand a particular matter, or a state of affairs, you should know the deeper reasons underling its existing form and the characteristics that gave it that specific appearance. You should also be conscious of the material causes of that matter, or issue, i.e. its constituents or ingredients. In other words:

1. The forces/causes that produced the revolt or uprising, which signify its truth are called “the causes at work”.

2. The nature of the revolt and its goals represent “its intents and purposes”.

3. The actual action plan, implementing it, and all what goes with it represent “its material causes”.

4. The end result that the revolt has come to produce represents its “overall picture”.

[Applying these parameters], was Imam Hussain’s uprising a result of an angry outburst?

Islam is different from some other movements for change or reform that took place as a result of certain circumstances that in turn led to eruptions. Dialectics, for example, encourages heightening disagreements, inciting discontent, and showing opposition even for genuine reforms in order to bring things to a head on collision, i.e. an explosive revolution, not a conscious one.

Islam does not subscribe to these types of revolutions. The history of most Islamic revolts or uprisings speaks of the rationale behind such revolts, in that they came as a result of a complete understanding of the status quo they were determined to change. Thus, Imam Hussain’s revolt was not a result of an angry outburst, prompted by the pressures exerted by the Umayyad rule, especially

during the reigns of Mu'aawiyah [the founder of the dynastic rule], and his son, Yezid. Rather, it was a very well calculated move. What substantiates the position the Imam (a.s.) took in this regard was the letters he exchanged with both the men; and the sermons he gave on different occasions, especially that one he addressed the Companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in Mina, [in present day Saudi Arabia] with. All this evidence points in the direction of one conclusion. That is, the Imam was fully aware of what he was intending to do, viz. taking on the ruling establishment. His revolt was free from any angry reaction; rather, it was a purely Islamic uprising.

Looking at Imam Hussain's revolt from another perspective, i.e. the way he was treating his followers, one can only come out with one conclusion. He was determined not to let the feelings of his companions run high, in a bid to avoid his revolt's earning any description of an explosive one. Of this strategy was his repeated attempts to appeal to his companions to leave his company, with a view to sparing them the fate that was awaiting them all, i.e. him included. He used to remind them every now and then that they should not expect any materialistic gain in their march, other than definite death. After he commended his companions, describing them as among the best of friends, he pleaded with them one last time, i.e. on the eve of the 10th of Muharram, [62 AH, 680 CE], to leave if they so wished, making it clear to them that they would be safe, for the Umayyad's were after his head alone.

You can hardly find a leader who aspires to utilize the dissatisfaction of his people to push them to revolt who talks in the same way Imam Hussain (a.s.) was talking to his companions. It is true that he was responsible for outlining to them their religious duty to rise against the despotic rule, in that resisting injustice and repression is such an obligation they have to discharge, yet he was seeking that his companions would discharge their responsibility of their own accord, i.e. without coercion. That was why he reiterated to them to melt away from the battlefield under the cover of darkness because the enemy was not going to pursue them had they taken flight, nor had he wanted to force them to fight. He further advised them that he would absolve them from their oath of allegiance to him, should they have chosen to forsake him, in that he left it to their own consciences. That is, whichever way they decided, it had to be dictated by siding with the right, i.e. without compulsion, either from him or from the enemy. It would be their own choice alone. However, their decision to remain with the Imam gave the martyrs of Kerbala the high regard they are held with.

To draw a comparison between the position taken by Imam Hussain (a.s.) and Tariq bin Ziyad in the battle of Jabal Tariq *[the Rock of Gibraltar],* we would say that what Ibn Ziyad resorted to of action is symptomatic of a leader with a politician's mentality, whereas Imam Hussain was conscious not to force the fight on his comrades in arms.

What Ibn Ziyad did was to burn all the food supplies save that which could sustain his troops for twenty-four hours. He then addressed them in a sermon to the effect that they had no choice but to win the battle, making it clear that if they did not win, the result would be one of two: They would either be routed by the army of the enemy or got drowned in the sea, should they have chosen to flee. In contrast, Imam Hussain (a.s.) left the choice to the small band of his followers to engage the enemy in combat or turn back, for neither the enemy nor he were coercing them to fight.

Indeed, the Imam's revolt had its roots in the complete understanding, by all parties of his camp, of

its inevitability. Thus, it should not be described as though it were brought about by a disgruntled man. This responsible revolt had a multiplicity of factors, in that it was neither a single entity nor a single-aim movement.

Among the differences that exist between matters of the physical world and the social one is that in the material world minerals always demonstrate a single essence. For instance, you cannot find, as a raw material, gold and copper in a single entity. In contrast, in social phenomena, it is quite possible that a single phenomenon might demonstrate a variety of realities and essences. Man is such a wonder because he can boast several essences at the same time.

Jean-Paul Sartre, [1905 - 1980], the French existentialist philosopher and writer, maintained that the existence of man precedes his essence. He is right in this part of his statement. In addition to that, man could possess different semblances at the same time. For example, he could demonstrate a semblance of an angel, a pig, and a tiger.

['Existentialism' is a loose term for the reaction led by Kierkegaard, against the abstract rationalism of Hegel's philosophy. As against Hegel's conception of 'abstract consciousness' within which all oppositions are supposedly reconciled, Kierkegaard insisted on the irreducibility of the subjective, personal dimension of human life. He characterized this in terms of the perspective of the 'existing individual'. Kierkegaard rejected the claim that we can look forward to a time when the different interests and concerns of people can be satisfied through their comprehension within an all-embracing objective understanding of the universe.]

According to this, it can be said that social phenomena might exhibit multi-dimensional realities. Imam Hussain's revolt is such a multi-faceted event, not least because several factors were jointly at work to produce it. For example, there might erupt a revolt in reaction to a particular occurrence, i.e. under the spur of the moment. It might as well be a positive reaction to a certain trend and a negative one in the face of another trend. All these factors were present in Imam Hussain's revolt, hence the description, "a multi-character revolt".

Historically, the first factor in the Imam's uprising was the Umayyad's demand of him to swear allegiance to Yezid, [their second Caliph]. In a bid to secure the following of the generality of Muslims to his son, Yezid, Mu'aawiyah sent an emissary to Medina to secure the pledging of such allegiance from Imam Hussain (a.s.). In so doing, Mu'aawiyah had aimed to set a precedent for those rulers who would follow him to appoint their successors, turning the caliphate into a dynastic rule. It is noteworthy that insisting on securing the Imam's swearing of allegiance meant giving legitimacy to the caliphate. What was Imam Hussain's response to that demand? Naturally, it was turned down, not least because Hussain (a.s.) was the grandson of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and was widely known for his piety and scant regard for worldly pleasures.

Upon receiving the news of the Imam's rejection, the ruling establishment issued threats to him. His response was that he would rather die than endorse Yezid's succession to the caliphate. Up to that point in time, the Imam's reaction was of the passive type to an unlawful demand. In other words, a reaction based on piety and a reality stemming from the slogan, "There is no god but God", which makes it incumbent on the believer to say no to any illegitimate demand.

That rejection was not the only reason for the Imam's revolt. There was another issue, which demonstrated the underlying principle of his revolt; it was a positive reaction. That is, after the demise of Mu'aawiyah, the people of Kufa, *[Iraq]* cast their memories some twenty years back, i.e. to the days of the caliphate of Imam Ali (a.s.). Despite the fact that many of Ali's disciples were liquidated by the Umayyad terror machine, such as Hijr bin Adi, Amr bin Hamq al-Khuza'ie, Rashid al-Hijri, and Maythem at-Tammar, just to render Medina bereft of the heavyweights among the companions of the Prophet, the people called to mind how Ali (a.s.) was the example of the true Muslim and his rule a just one. Thus, they convened in Kufa and agreed among themselves to reject the endorsement of Yezid as caliph, turning their attention to Imam Hussain (a.s.) with the offer to become their Islamic caliph. They wrote to the Imam to this effect, expressing their readiness to welcome him to re-establish the Islamic rule in Kufa. Some one hundred thousand people signed those letters. As a result, those people did not leave the Imam with any choice other than to accede to their request. That was the positive reaction. In conclusion, it can be safely said that the true nature of the Imam's movement was a legitimate one, in that a group of Muslims initiated the action and the Imam had to provide them with his positive response.

Upholding his religious obligation, the Imam had no choice but to announce his outright rejection to sanctioning Yezid's appointment *[by his father]* as Caliph, not least for raising his pure self above that blemish they wanted to stain him with. However, had he agreed to Abdullah bin Abbas's proposition to retire to the mountains of Yemen to escape the troops of Yezid, he would have secured his safety. On the other hand, he would have absolved himself from condoning the appointment of Yezid as Caliph. And yet, since the issue was one which related to the appeal to him by those hundred thousand people, he had no alternative but to agree to that appeal out of a religious obligation. That is, despite the fact that all the indications were telling him that the Kufans were not up to the task and that they were both inactive and apprehensive. Nevertheless, his sense of responsibility made it incumbent on him to respond to their call and thus provide the right answer to history. Had he chosen to ignore the plea of the Kufans, we would have stood today criticising him for "not doing so".

Imam Hussain's revolt, the causes

As we have already mentioned the invitation of the Kufans to Imam Hussain (a.s.) to come to Kufa and set up an Islamic government there represented the third side *[of the triangle]* of causes of his revolt. The request of the Umayyad's from the Imam that he endorsed Yezid's appointment to the office of the caliphate epitomized the "defensive strategy". However, as is known, the Imam consequently turned that request down, and set out to oppose the corrupt ruling establishment with all means at his disposal out of upholding the religious duty of "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil". This ingredient, *[or the third side of the triangle],* should be dubbed "the attacking strategy" of the Imam's revolt.

Let us now dwell a while on those factors to examine which of them carried more weight than the others. It goes without saying that each of the three factors is different from the others in its cumulative value and importance to the revolt. That is, each of the contributory causes added, in its own right, a unique and significant dimension to the revolt. For example, the Imam's acceptance of

the Kufans' invitation to go to Kufa is as significant as the other two factors, and yet in accordance with their importance and impact on the *[overall result]* of the revolt. Among the factors is that which enhances the significance of a certain *[reformist]* movement. Similarly, the leader of the movement can influence that particular factor, by way of raising its profile.

The human being, for instance, is well aware of many things that he attaches importance to. For example, his appearance could be regarded as an asset; his coveting jewellery could be deemed another valuable experience. There are as well other material and abstract things which man would wish to acquire as they are considered exhibits of beauty. And no doubt, power and high profile, especially divine positions, are viewed by man as sources of pride, splendour and value. Even the external material appearances, which denote these added values, confer on man an added value.

To illustrate this, take a person who has put on the special garb of the clergy. Although, in itself, the attire is not indicative of the godliness of the one who wore it, in that it is not a criterion by which one can measure erudition of the wearer, nor the level of his piety, yet it can be seen as giving such an impression to the person putting on such garb. Likewise, the person who wears such clothes could earn the respect and regard of others. By the same token, such attire becomes a source of pride for the person who is dressed up in it. The parable of this is the jewellery worn by women, in that how items of jewellery can adorn women and how the latter can derive satisfaction from and pride in wearing them.

The same comparison can be applied to revolutions, in that there may be factors that are capable of enhancing their richness and appeal. This is the result of the theoretical differences between one revolution and the other. Some are bereft of the moral dimension and characterized by bigotry, instead; others may be purely materialistic, giving them their distinctive features. And yet, if a revolution is characterized by the moral, human, and divine aspects, it should stand head and shoulders above all other revolutions.

Thus, all the three factors which contributed to the initiation of Imam Hussain's revolt,gave it the significance it boasts, especially the third factor. Sometimes, a particular person with a particular significance in a particular uprising could add a new value to it, i.e. a special added value and significance. In as much as a certain factor adds a new value to the value of the person, he in return gives a boost to this value. For example, the attire of a spiritual person (cleric) or a university professor could exude pride and aesthetic appearance to those who wear those uniforms. The opposite is also true, in that the person in those garbs is the source of pride and aestheticism due to their impeccable character, probity, and knowledge.

Sa'sa'a bin Sawhan was one of Imam Ali's companions and a renowned and consummate orator; he was commended by the famous man of letters, al-Jahidh. When he wanted to congratulate the Imam on his election to the office of Caliphate, he said something to the Imam that was different from what all the other people said, thus, "*O Ali! You adorned the caliphate with splendour. You are the source of its pride. It granted you neither grandeur nor pride. The caliphate was in need of a person of your calibre, and yet you were not in need of its [allure]. I, therefore, congratulate the caliphate because your name has become synonymous with it; I do not applaud you because you have become the Caliph!*"

As a result, it can be said that the factor of "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil" had given Imam Hussain's revolt an added significance. And by his, his family's and companions' ultimate sacrifice, the Imam has raised the profile of this institution. There are many people who might claim the upholding of this religious obligation. Imam Hussain (a.s.) demonstrated this on the ground, "*I seek to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil and follow the traditions of my grandfather and my father.*" This is the parable of Islam that might be a source of pride for many a man. And yet, there have been Muslims whom Islam holds dear and feels proud of. The various titles, which were earned by many luminaries, such as "*Fakhrul Islam* – the Pride of Islam", "*Izzuddin* – the Glory of Religion", and "*Sharafuddin* – the Honour of Religion", are indicative of this meaning. Abdu Thar, Ammar bin Yasir, [among the Companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.)], and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), [(980 – 1198 CE), the famous Muslim philosopher and physician], were brought up on the ideals of Islam and thus have become a source of pride for it. Islam, in return, feels proud of some of its sons, who had been moulded in its image, so much so that they have earned an international renown, not least because they have left their mark on the human civilization. The world cannot deny the contribution of Khawaja Nasiruddin at-Tusi, [(597 – 672 AH, 1201 – 1274 CE), the Muslim philosopher, vizier, and theologian], to the human civilization, because the credit goes to him for some discoveries relating to the moon.

So, it can be said that Imam Hussain bin Ali (a.s.) has indeed given the required momentum to the tradition of "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil". And when it is maintained that this institution raises the weight of Muslims, this does not come from a vacuum. The Holy Qur'an has stated this,

"**You are the best of peoples evolved for mankind. Enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah.."** (3/110).

Just ponder the couching of this verse, especially with regard to the quality bestowed on "the best people". That is, it is merely by virtue of their upholding the religious duty of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong", they have earned that sublime praise. So, the worth of this *umma* (community) is in its upholding this obligation.

However, insofar as Imam Hussain's revolt is concerned, it is the Imam who has conferred that sublime honour on this obligation by the sacrifices he personally made, and those of his family and companions. However, it is not enough that we, Muslims, are not up to the responsibility of upholding this religious obligation, we are proving to be a liability to it. It is regrettable that people have paid much attention to not so important things, such as growing one's beard and prohibiting the wearing of gold [for men], and paid lip service to significant matters that should be upheld. In contrast, Imam Hussain (a.s.) revolted to keep the principle of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" live in all spheres of life. He used to say that Yezid was the epitome of rejection and that he should be effaced from the world of Islam. He further affirmed that the Imam of Muslims must be the one who upholds the injunctions contained in the Book of God, [i.e. the Holy Qur'an], administer justice, and follow the true religion.

Imam Hussain sacrificed everything in the way of safeguarding this institution and enforcing it. The Imam gave a more sober meaning to death in this cause. It has become to imply grandeur and

honour. Since he set out on his journey from Medina to Kerbala, he was always talking about death in dignity and honour, i.e. the death in the cause of right, truth, and justice. Such a death is akin to a beautiful necklace that adorns the neck of a young woman. The Imam often recited a line of poetry en route in his fateful journey to Kerabala. The poem read something like this: *Despite the fact that this life is sweet and beautiful, yet, the next life is sweeter and more beautiful.* Since, in the end, man will leave behind, after death, all his worldly possessions, the good comes out of giving away one's wealth in good causes, instead of hoarding it. By the same token, since the human body would turn to dust after death, why should not man die a sweet and honourable death? Thus, dying with the sword in the cause of God is much greater and lovelier.

On the other side of the equation, the example of Abu Salama al-Khallal, who used to be dubbed "the Minister of the Household of Mohammad" in the court of the Abbasid Caliph, serves the reverse of the above-mentioned honourable death. His story goes like this: When he fell out of favour with the Abbasid Caliph, an incident which he later paid with his life for, he wrote two letters, one to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) and the other to Mohammad bin Abdullah al-Mahdh, offering them his services and those of Abu Muslim, *[i.e. intending to stage a palace coup]*. This was his message to them: Should you be prepared for this, *[i.e. taking over the caliphate],* and accept our offer, we will kill those, *[i.e. the Abbasid rulers].*

The immediate impression the contents of this letter gives is that the writer is disloyal because he addressed his letter to two different people, but only when his relationship with his masters turned sour.

As soon as Imam as-Sadiq received the letter and read it, he burned it before the eyes of the emissary who carried it to him. When the messenger asked the Imam as to his reply, the Imam informed him that he had nothing to add to what the messenger had just seen, [i.e. of burning the letter].

The Abbasid killed Abu Salama before he could meet with his messenger. Some people seem to raise the objection as why the Imam did not respond positively to the invitation of Abu Salama who called on him to rise to assume power with his help. That is, while the intension of Abu Salama was known; he was not sincere in his appeal as he wrote his letter immediately after he had fallen out favour with the Abbasid Caliph, who was sure that he could not be trusted any more. Thus, he met his violent death soon after.

Nevertheless, if Imam Hussain (a.s.) turned a blind eye to all those letters he had received from the Kufans, inviting him to go to them and set up an Islamic government there, he would have never escaped similar criticism. In Imam Hussain's case, he responded positively to the Kufans' appeals when he realized that they were genuine in their call for him to come to them. Thus, it became incumbent on him to respond.

Let us examine which of the following two matters came first and consequently had precedence over the other. Did the Imam's rejection of the Umayyad's call to him to endorse Yezid as Caliph come first, i.e. prior to the Kufans' invitation to him to come to Kufa and form an Islamic government? It goes without saying that the former came first for demanding Imam Hussain's swearing of allegiance to Yezid was made immediately after the demise of his father, Mu'aawiyah.

The messenger, who brought the news of Mu'aawiyah's death to the governor of Medina, brought with him a letter containing a demand that Imam Hussain, and some other personalities, endorsed the succession of Yezid to the caliphate. It is quite probable that the Kufans did not know then of the news of the demise of Muaawiyah. Historical events lend support to this theory. That is, many days had elapsed on Imam Hussain's rejection of the demand from him to swear allegiance to Yazid before he was forced under pressure to leave Medina and embark on his opposition movement there and then, i.e. 27th Rajab on the way to Mecca, [in a sort of self-imposed exile]. He arrived in Mecca on 3rd Sha'ban. He received the letters from the Kufans on 15th Ramadhan. [In the Islamic Hijri Calendar, those three months run consecutively, thus, Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramadha.]. That is, a month and a half after the Umayyad's made their intention of demanding the Imam to swear allegiance known, and his subsequent flat rejection of the demand. Imam Hussain stayed in Mecca for forty days. Accordingly, he did not reject the Umayyad's call for him to endorse Yezid as Caliph because of the Kufans' appeals to him to head to Kufa to form the next Islamic government. He made his position manifestly known that he would not give in to Yezid, even if not a foothold in the entire globe was left for him. This is the second reason for the rising of al-Hussain (a.s.).

The third pillar of the Imam's rising is the upholding of the Islamic duty of "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil". The Imam (a.s.) started his dissident movement from Medina determined to shoulder the responsibility of this duty. However, even if he was not asked to pay allegiance to Yezid and there was no invitation for him to go to Kufa to set up a rival caliphate there, he was resolved that it was his duty to uphold that tradition, not least because corruption was about to take a stranglehold over the Islamic world then.

To recap, in each one of the three aspects of his revolt, the Imam (a.s.) had had a particular issue to address and a duty to discharge. As regards the first aspect, it was his decision to refuse the Umayyad's demand to endorse Yezid's succession to the caliphate. Regarding the second facet, he responded positively to the appeal of the Kufans for him to set up a rival caliphate in Kufa. In relation to the third aspect, he took the necessary action to take on the corrupt ruling establishment. Thus, he can be safely branded a revolutionary. So, when we dub Imam Hussain's revolt as multifaceted, this is clearly manifested in the required positions he took vis-à-vis the three different issues. For example, the Imam's duty towards pledging allegiance to Yezid was downright rejection; and should he have agreed to the proposition of Ibn Abbas to choose a self-imposed exile in the mountains of Yemen, such rejection would have materialized. Thus, his was a personal decision, i.e. it was not incumbent on him to ask others to team up with him on this point. As for the Kufans' appeal, there was no choice left for him but to respond to it, so long as they remained faithful to their word. If they broke it, the Imam would be absolved from any undertaking, as the issue of caliphate, *[and who the caliph should be],* would be no more, i.e. it would cease to remain a religious duty.

Yet, why did the Imam continue on that path? This is indicative of the fact that his religious obligation was not confined to the contentious issue of caliphate. The Kufans' appeal proved to be a blip, as the news of the killing of Muslim bin Aqeel, his cousin and emissary to the Kufans, reached him while en route to Kufa, Iraq. Another development was that the Imam met before his arrival al-Hur bin Yezid ar-Riyahi, *[during which it was revealed that the Kufans had changed their mind and no longer supported him in his bid to become caliph with their help].* So, with the Kufans' appeal falling through, the Imam had become free from any obligation. To make it absolutely plain to them, he

reminded them that he would return from where he came, in that he came to them in response to their appeal. This, though, did not mean that he had changed his mind regarding the caliphate of Yezid, which he still was adamant that he did not approve of. As far as he was concerned, his position of not recognizing Yezid as caliph was irreversible, hence the reference to not giving in to the ruling establishment's demand, even if all routes were closed in his face. What other options did he have? The answer is his upholding the principle of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong".

Among the mistakes the author of the book, "*Ash-Shaheedul Khalid* – The Immortal Martyr" did was that he over-exaggerated the factor of the "Kufans' invitation", so much so that he has given the impression that it was the overriding stimulant for Imam Hussain's revolt. In fact, this factor was not the most important; rather, it was the least important among the contributory factors that led to the Imam's revolt. Even if we assume that it was the principal cause of the revolt, the Imam, after knowing that the Kufans did not keep their word, could have resigned to the fact that there was no point in carrying on with his plans, contemplating swearing allegiance to Yezid and abandoning his bid to uphold the principle of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong". The opposite was precisely what had happened, in that the fieriest sermons by the Imam were those given in the aftermath of the fall of Kufa to the Umayyad's. In that, there was a clear message that he was acting in accordance with the obligation of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong", and that he was under no illusions that that was his prime motive for launching his revolt. For his part, it was an action of a revolutionary against the ruling establishment of that time.

On his way to Iraq, he met by chance two men coming from the direction of Kufa. He asked them to stop in order to have a conversation with them. The moment they knew it was al-Hussain (a.s.), they took a detour and disappeared, to avoid talking to him. Meanwhile, a man among the Imam's companions, who happened to have met the two men, arrived at the scene. He broke to the Imam the news of the killing of Muslim bin Aqeel and Hani bin Irwah, having received it from the two men he had met earlier. It was through the same men, although indirectly, that the Imam knew of the fall of Kufa to the Umayyad's. His companion also informed al-Hussain that the two men felt ashamed to let the Imam know of the distressing news, especially the report about dragging the headless corpse of Muslim in the streets of Kufa. Upon hearing the news, the Imam's eyes became filled with tears, reciting this Qur'anic verse,

"Among the Believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God: of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme), and some (still) wait: but they have never changed (their determination) in the least." (33/23).

The Imam (a.s.) wanted to prove to the people that he did not come for Kufa alone. So, if that province fell to the enemy, it would not change anything. He did not launch his movement in response to the Kufans' appeal *per se.* That appeal was among the factors that made him march to Iraq. Imam Hussain made it very clear that he saw himself responsible for discharging a more important duty. So, if Muslim bin Aqeel got martyred, he would have honoured his covenant and passed away in the line of duty. Thus, the Imam must continue treading the same path he had mapped out for his movement.

Since the Imam had decided to take an attacking position against the Umayyad rule, and marched on that revolutionary path, his rationale for doing so was different from a person who was in a defensive

position or that of an acquiescent one. The position of a person who is repelling an attacker, who has, for example, come to rob him of his possessions, would be getting what was stolen from him and protect it. The person who is intent on taking on his rival is in a different league; he would not accept anything other than annihilating the enemy, and achieving his goal, even if they got killed in the process.   Imam Hussain's drive was that of upholding "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong." It was the mindset of a martyr and the path he decided to walk on.

He who wants his appeal to reach his community advocates the logic of the martyr. This appeal bears a signature made with his blood. Examples of people who wanted their message to reach others abound. In many a place all over the world, we come across relics of bygone personalities who wanted their exploits to be remembered, so much so that some of them had such accomplishments written as epitaph on their gravestones. Hundreds of years later such relics are excavated and displayed in museums to be kept as heritage for future generations.   In contrast, Imam Hussain (a.s.) wrote down with his own blood his epic on the airwaves of everlasting frequencies. His message is stamped on people's hearts because it was laced with blood, thus leaving an indelible mark there. The hearts of millions of people, be they Arab or non-Arab, who understood the message of the Imam, are conscious of the sincerity of his message, especially when he recited, "*I look upon death as felicity and regard life in the shadows of the oppressors as nothing but unhappiness.*"   That is, living in indignity in the doldrums of injustice and repression, and barely surviving is not the type of life a free man would want to live. Thus, "better die with honour than live in shame" was his motto, i.e. that of martyrs.

Imam Hussain (a.s.) chose the position from which he would attack the regime; his rationale was that of a person racing to martyrdom. From the inhospitable terrain of Kerbala, Iraq, he wanted the whole world to know his rejection of the ruler of his days, [who was not fit to rule]. He did not have the tools to write his call, and yet his message transcended the barriers of time, place, and race to rest in the hearts and minds of people. As is customary each and every year, come Muharram and there the light of Imam Hussain shines on us like beams of light emanating from the sun. His message is heard loud and clear, "*The similitude of the inevitability of man's death is that of necklace worn by a young woman. I therefore yearn to have reunion with my predecessors in the same way Jacob was yearning to be reunited with [his son] Joseph*", and this glaring statement, "*The bastard and the son of a bastard has left us but two choices, either resorting to the sword or capitulating. How preposterous! Humiliation is not our cup of tea! Allah shall never let this happen to us; so shall His Messenger, the believers, chaste and pure laps and proud souls. For the sake of these ideals we would rather die in honour and not give in to the ignoble.*" There is a reference in this sermon to Ibn Ziyad, who had offered the Imam one of two choices, either the sword or ignominious surrender.

That was the message the Imam wanted to live on through time and generations. That is, neither God nor His Messenger and the believers would let a pious believer experience the bitter taste of disgrace. The generations and believers would come to know about the resistance of the Imam when no one would accept the notion of the Imam's surrendering to the enemy. It was inconceivable that a person, such as the Imam, who was purebred, under the wing of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, could give in to indignity.

When he left Medina, armed with his refusal to endorse Yezid's succession to the caliphate as a reason for his attack on the repressive regime, he wrote a will and left it with his brother Mohammad bin al-

Hanfiyah; among its contents was this statement, "*I did not set out driven by arrogance, or recklessness, or a desire for spreading corruption, or injustice. All what I am intent on is seeking to reform the community of my grandfather.* "

This was the rationale behind the Imam's movement.

In the letter he wrote to his brother, Bin al-Hanafiyah, the Imam mentioned the incident of the Umayyad's demanding from him to pledge allegiance to Yezid, but not even a single reference to the call of the Kufans to him *[to come over and form a rival caliphate in Kufa].*

That unequivocal rejection underlined the Imam's determination to walk the road of martyrdom to the end. Had his logic stemmed from the love for defending oneself alone, it would have been rational that he would not have given his companions the choice, on the eve of the tenth of Muharram, of either parting his company or sticking it out with him. All along, he was clear in his mind and sincere with them that the army of Ibn Ziyad was after him alone, i.e. he either gave in and endorsed Yezid as caliph or got killed on the battlefield. In his judgement, his position, on not recognizing Yezid's rule, was dictated by his sense of religious duty, as he did not think Yezid was fit to rule. Yet, his companions chose, of their own accord, to stay with him to the end, preferring to get martyred rather than part his company. For this noble stance, the Imam turned to his Lord and prayed for his companions, asking Him to reward them on his behalf.

This is reinforced by the fact that on that same night, the Imam requested that Habib bin Mudhahir al-Assadi go and ask for the help of members of his tribe. Suppose that Habib managed to galvanise some fifty or sixty combatants. What difference would this number make in comparison to some thirty thousand soldiers on the other side? Certainly, it would have made no difference to tilt the impending battle in favour of the Imam's side. So, what was the reason for this request? The Imam wanted to win the 'media' war in order that the news of his revolt travelled far and wide. This is the rationalization of the revolutionaries and martyrs. That was why he started this move in his own immediate circle by bringing with him all members of his family for he wanted them to be messengers for his revolt.